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## Research on Empowerment Training Model for English Majors Based on Employability

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### Abstract

Based on empowerment theory, this paper examines the English-majors' quality of employment, describes the key elements of English-majors' employability, and constructs empowerment training model for English majors in colleges and universities which suggests that the teachers be empowered by improving the curriculum system, innovating the practical teaching model and expanding the training channels and that English majors be empowered to accumulate their skills, knowledge, abilities and accomplishments so that English majors' employability can be promoted.

**Key words:** English majors; Empowerment theory; Employability

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### INTRODUCTION

The improvement of college undergraduates' employability is a difficult problem to solve, and its theoretical research is relatively weak. The studies show that the definitions of the employability and other related terms are vague and mixed with each other, which may cause confusion at the cognitive level and bring a lot of problems in practice.

One of the most important criteria to measure the effectiveness of talent training is employability which was first proposed by Beveridge (1909). Since then, scholars have done some research on the connotation of employability and its structural elements, regarding employability as a comprehensive ability related to all industries and occupations. Undergraduates' employment status and achievement can be used as a guidance for schools to promote curriculum reform programmes. Twenty-five European countries signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, which stated that one of the primary objectives of the higher education system reform was to enhance the citizens' employability. Speight et al. (2013) and Tymon (2013) studied the relationship between employability and talent training from different perspectives of stakeholders, such as, government, schools, students and employers. Some scholars argued that the employability should be embedded into the curriculum system and the talent training programs (Yorke, 2004; Yorke & Knight, 2006). Jackson and Wilton (2016) studied the ways of improving students' employability, and thought that work-integrated learning was helpful to promote the students' employability.

### 1. THE ELEMENTS OF EMPLOYABILITY

There are three stages for the evolution of employability: the early development stage, the dynamic evolution stage, and the extension and enrichment stage. According to the three stages of development, the studies on employability are mainly focused on the following six perspectives: competency perspective, employability perspective, labor market relations perspective, generality perspective, competitiveness perspective, multi-dimensional interactive perspective. He (2017) studies employability from the logical perspective and indicates that employability is a categorical concept concerning the "meta-problem" of employment, and the macroscopic

expression of all the elements, resources, forces and their mutual relations associated with employment. It reflects the actual state of employment, the development process, efficiency and effectiveness, yearning degree, level and quality, and future trends. To be specific, employability manifests the employment subjects, objects and their interactive relationships, as well as the labor markets, environments, policies and other factors. The International Labor Organization defines employability as the ability to make good use of available educational and training opportunities to obtain and maintain decent work, and to make progress in work and available competencies and qualifications to cope with the changing technology and labor markets (ILO 2004).

As for structural elements of employability, the most influential researches are SCANS report, process model, USEM model, psycho-social construction model and Career EDGE model.

According to the SCANS report of US Department of Labor, employees should have three basic competencies and five types of competencies which are basic skills, thinking skills and personal qualities, as well as the ability of overall managing resources, interpersonal skills, the ability of acquiring information and use of information, treatment capacity of the system, and technical capabilities. According to Carnevale and Smith (2013), employability consists of basic competences, including reading, writing, and computing; basic skills, including learning to learn; communication skills, including listening and speaking; adaptability, including problem-solving, creative thinking; group effectiveness, including interpersonal skills, negotiation, teamwork; influencing ability, including organizational ability, leadership; personal management, including self-esteem, motivation, goal setting; adaptability, including cognitive style; and applied skills, including vocational ability and professional ability.

Based on the previous studies on the definitions of employability, the elements of English-majored undergraduates' employability are made up of three categories which are basic skills, basic working ability, and spiritual accomplishment, including fourteen items. In the fourteen items, understanding and communication skills which include the ability of comprehensive reading, oral communication, listening, and understanding others; the ability of scientific thinking which includes the ability of scientific analysis, critical thinking, mathematical analysis, and targeted writing; the ability of application analysis which includes the ability of system analysis, system evaluation, solving problems, and product conception; and the ability of management which includes the ability of time management, material management, financial management, human resource management, coordination arrangement, judgment and decision-making and so on.

## 2. THE STATUS QUO OF THE ENGLISH-MAJORED TALENTS' EMPLOYABILITY

With the continuous expansion of the scope of English majors, translation majors and business English majors are commonly referred to as English majors, and the employment markets for English majors have also been expanded. The work of English majors is no longer confined to English, but involves many fields, so the knowledge structure and literacy of English majors need to be expanded to meet the diverse needs.

At present, few researches focus on the employability of English majors. There is also a lack of accurate measurement of the English majors' employability. According to the limited research, the current situation of the employability of English majors is mainly reflected in the following aspects.

### 2.1 The "Basic Skills" of English Majors

The ability of using English is English majors' core competence. The education that English majors receive in schools can meet societal needs, but their related professional knowledge is insufficient, such as economic and trade knowledge, and management knowledge.

### 2.2 The "Basic Working Ability" of English Majors

Zhao and Wang (2016) conducted a survey on the students who were undergraduates in the years 2012 and 2013 of a foreign language college. The results showed that they were not very satisfied with their basic working ability. Practical teaching could not meet the requirements of the society and their professional practice needed to be strengthened. Among the understanding and communication ability, scientific thinking ability and management ability, the three specific abilities, including oral communication ability, targeted writing ability and human resource management ability, were considered as the most important for English majors. However, the undergraduates were not satisfied with these three abilities.

### 2.3 The Spiritual Literacy

The undergraduates are satisfied with their great efforts, tolerance, and community concern, but they still lack the basic understanding of the teamwork that enterprises and public institutions attach importance to. As far as the tasks that require team work with high quality and high efficiency, their competences are insufficient.

## 3. THE CONSTRUCTION OF EMPOWERMENT TRAINING MODEL FOR ENGLISH MAJORS

The training model for English majors was constructed based on empowerment theory.

### 3.1 Empowerment Theory

The empowerment theory was proposed in the 1970s and it belongs to the category of the basic theory of social work. Empowerment theory refers to the individuals or groups who have the power to improve their self-efficacy and change their powerless and weak status through their own efforts, the development of group awareness and the external promotion. Empowerment includes two models: external impetus and individual initiative. External impetus model refers to forces that the external exerts to promote the individuals' development while individual initiative model is that the individuals make efforts to stimulate their own potential, learn knowledge, promote their ability, and improve their status, aiming at being empowered. On the basis of the empowerment theory put forward by sociologists, the American educators first put forward teachers' empowerment and students' empowerment. It is feasible to construct the framework of employability empowerment to study and solve the current college students' employment problems (Liu, Yu, & Ma, 2015).

## 3.2 Taking Colleges and Universities as an External Impetus to Improve English Majors' Employability

### 3.2.1 Reconstructing the Curriculum System

According to the national teaching quality standard of foreign languages and literature, the curriculum system includes five parts: general education courses, professional core courses, training orientation courses, practical teaching and graduation thesis. The relationships between general education and professional education, between language skill training and professional knowledge teaching, between foreign language major courses and related professional courses should be dealt with properly while the curriculum is set, and ability cultivation and professional knowledge construction should be emphasized, especially the cultivation of cross-cultural, speculative and innovative abilities, and a dynamic curriculum adjustment mechanism should be established according to the needs of economic and social development. English majors have a strong desire for their development of writing ability, communication ability, knowledge expansion and management ability. Therefore, curriculum system should meet English majors' needs, and pay attention to the combination of general education and professional education. Besides the general education courses, professional core courses and training orientation courses, the broad range of subject courses can be added to. Furthermore, a platform for the mandatory foreign language minor can be built, making English majors combined with other related majors, and content-based English teaching curriculum modules should be set up, to build a multi-dimensional growth path for English majors.

### 3.2.2 Taking the Cooperative Community as the Vehicle

In the cultivation of English majors, the practical teaching is not satisfactory, and the practical teaching is almost a mere formality. The main reason is that the students' motivation for professional practice is insufficient, and the cooperative education mechanism between the internship units and schools has not been set up yet. It is difficult for students to improve their practical ability. Therefore, it is necessary for schools of foreign languages to learn from the practices of European and American colleges and universities, and to explore the education model in which the employability is embedded in the talent training program. The cooperative education mechanism between schools and governments, schools and enterprises, schools and scientific research institutes, schools and schools should be constructed by establishing practice and training base, working out practical teaching goal, constructing practical courses and brand practical project together to enhance the English majors' ability of solving practical problems in their practical training. In addition, a mixed online and offline communication platform should be created to provide opportunities for students to communicate and interact with each other, enhancing students' intercultural communication ability, cooperative ability and critical thinking ability, as well as sensitivity to different cultures.

### 3.2.3 Creating an Environment of Multicultural Integration

It is quite essential to expand the channels of English majors' training, create an environment of multicultural integration, and realize the deep integration of localization and internationalization. Self-learning ability, critical thinking ability and cross-cultural communication ability are necessary for international talents, and cross-cultural communication ability is the core competitiveness of English majors. However, the training and guidance of the students' thinking have not received enough concern. Although in recent years, more and more attention has been paid to multimedia teaching and heuristic teaching, the teachers' enthusiasm is not high. As a result, there are no substantive changes and great progress (Cao, 2011).

Classroom presentation, group discussion, subject research are effective teaching activities to cultivate students' exploratory and critical thinking. At the same time, Schools of foreign languages should strengthen cooperation with other schools. On the one hand, the channels of international exchange between teachers and students should be expanded to explore the model of joint training with foreign universities, and encourage students to participate in student-exchange programs, international academic conferences, and other learning and practical activities; on the other hand, international students can be actively absorbed to promote the cooperation and exchange between Chinese and foreign students in the process of learning together, and to create an international

talent training environment with multi-cultural integration. The international exchange is helpful for the school to compare the professional curriculum at home and abroad, strengthen the curriculum development, promote the localization and internationalization of the curriculum. Furthermore, it is necessary to integrate the cultural value into the professional knowledge of teaching to cultivate English majors' patriotic feelings, national consciousness, cultural self-confidence, and international perspective, and help students learn to think, learn to communicate, learn to cooperate, enhancing their ability to participate in international affairs and international competition.

### **3.3 Enhancing English Majors' Individual-Oriented Active Empowerment**

English majors are given participation rights with empowerment as the goal. Student participation rights refer to the students' right to participate in all matters and interactions between academic and non-academic matters (Guo & Sun, 2012).

#### **3.3.1 English Majors' Participation in School Management and Classroom Teaching**

According to the empowerment theory, students' participation involves two aspects: the participation in school management and the participation in classroom teaching. The content of English majors' participation in management generally includes participation in university management and decision-making, student affairs management, logistics management and teaching management (Huang, 2014). In order to ensure that English majors have the rights to participate in school management and promote their subjective consciousness, schools of foreign languages should establish students' Congress system, and provide necessary training for students' representatives to participate in the administration. The students' congress of schools of foreign languages should elect representatives to attend the joint meeting of the Party and the government, the teaching committee meeting and the academic committee meeting, and make suggestions, express opinions and participate in decision-making; student representatives should regularly evaluate the performance of the major construction, the results of which should serve as an important basis to assess English majors, and provide opportunities for students to participate in management and decision-making at different levels. The student representatives may act as assistants to the president, the dean and the counselor; the student representatives should also participate in the formulation of the students' management system and the assessment of the students' rewards and punishments. In addition, students should independently manage various student associations and student activities, and participate in the management of the library and dormitory.

Students' participation in teaching management is the most important. English majors should participate in the

formulation of talent training scheme, teaching syllabus and teaching plan, the selection of teaching materials, the development of teaching materials and the teaching evaluation, and monitor their own learning process. Teachers are the instructors, promoters, organizers, supervisors and collaborators of students' learning. In other words, teachers should change the traditional role of knowledge imparting, endow students with the necessary learning decision-making power, and let students be responsible for their own learning. Specifically, students' participation in classroom teaching should be reflected in the three consecutive stages of classroom teaching: before class, during class and after class. Before class, students can participate in the design of lesson plans. Teachers can put the lesson plans designed by themselves on the teachers' homepages, and ask students to read on their own and make advice in the forum on teaching objectives, important and difficult teaching points, the design of classroom activities, and the processing and transformation of teaching materials. In class, students should participate in cooperation, inquiry and other learning activities, and teachers only explain the difficult points that the students' encounter in their preview. Students acquire knowledge in the teacher-guided cooperative inquiry, cultivate their comprehensive ability to use English, master interpersonal communication skills. After class, students should participate in class evaluation and use campus network to provide feedback on the situation of classroom learning, which is beneficial for teachers to improve their teaching, and for students to comment on teachers' classroom teaching, which is beneficial to their own development.

#### **3.3.2 English Majors' Development of General Vocational Competence**

General vocational competence is an important part of employability. English majors should take the initiative to participate in social practical activities to cultivate their professional ability, creative thinking ability, ability for knowledge transfer and cooperative ability; they should have the awareness of lifelong learning, pay attention to the developmental trend of the industry, enlarge their knowledge, and enhance their vocational competence.

The network quality courses, large-scale open online courses (massive open online courses, MOOCs) and other online courses provide a platform and resources for knowledge storage, renewal and lifelong learning. English majors should formulate a reasonable general vocational competence training program and implementation plan in their college years so that they become inter-disciplinary talents, with a good general vocational competence, to achieve initiative empowerment of employability.

Good personality quality is an important aspect for students to exert their own advantages and take the initiative to increase their employability. Personality quality belongs to the category of non-knowledge ability

of employability. Scientific world outlook, views on life and values, good working attitude, honesty and trustworthiness, healthy psychology, cheerful character and strong will are the external manifestations of excellent quality. Modern enterprises and public institutions need their employees to identify with the enterprise and public institution culture. High-quality employees can bring positive effects for the development of enterprises and public institutions, maintain a good image of enterprises and public institutions, enhance the cultural atmosphere of enterprises and public institutions, and enhance the vitality of enterprises' and public institutions' stamina. Good personality are beneficial for the English majors to actively empower themselves to promote their own employability.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals the requirements of the society for the English majors in the aspects of knowledge structure and competences. It shows that English language skills, economic and trade knowledge, management knowledge, effective communication and targeted writing are the core elements of English majors' employability. The advantages of English language teaching in schools of foreign languages ensure that English majors have good English language skills, but it is urgent for schools of foreign languages to enlarge English majors' related knowledge, and cultivate their communication ability, writing ability, management ability and other key qualities and abilities. Based on empowerment theory, this paper reconsiders the English majors' training system in colleges and universities, and suggests that the teachers be empowered by improving the curriculum system, innovating the practical teaching model and expanding the training channels and that English majors be empowered to accumulate their skills, knowledge, abilities and accomplishments so that they can become talents who can meet the needs of the times.

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